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The importance of lexical phrases and other multiple-word sequences in foreign or second language (L2) learning is now widely accepted, and their incorporation in language teaching programs recommended (Cf., for example, Nattinger 1988: 77). Each such phrase manifests the grammatical rules applying in the phrase, and when actually used, it seems to manifest (1) the speaker's knowledge of the abstract grammatical rules that apply, and (2) his skill in manipulating the concrete wording involved. Regarding (1), however, it must be borne in mind that such sequences of words may be learned and used at first as units, without analysis and reconstruction and possibly without a full knowledge of the grammar involved.

Grammar and familiarity

My purpose here is to look at certain aspects of the relationship between abstract grammatical knowledge and familiarity with concrete wording, and to suggest a few of the many possible applications in the development of foreign language proficiency for normal conversational communication.

By "familiarity" is meant a native (or very proficient) speaker's ability to recognize wording accurately in the normal flow of rapid speech heard, and the ability to articulate naturally sequences of sounds which are required by a sequence of words. It is a hearing and speaking familiarity, not, for example, a visual familiarity with written forms. It is a familiarity with *wording as it actually sounds*, extending to both hearing and speaking skills.

Regarding abstract grammar, it is widely assumed by language teachers that grammar needs to be taught, or in any case needs to be learned, in order for a learner to succeed in achieving proficiency in L2. But we do not yet know clearly what that grammatical knowledge is that accounts for innovation according to L2 rules and without those rules being consciously called to mind in the process. Still, if speaking of innovation "according to L2 rules," we can eliminate other types of innovation, such as the following:

1. Common sense substitution: A sentence like "Tom likes apples" in any language allows for the substitution of alternative vocabulary, and insofar as this applies even to languages about which we know nothing, we are able to create sentences we have never used or heard--on the basis of this common sense, prior to knowing any of the language-specific grammar.

2. Innovation by transfer: Whether the resulting L2 sentences are grammatically correct or not, innovation based on transfer from L1 is not a reflection of knowledge of L2 grammar acquired as such.
3. Conscious rule application: Also eliminated from the idea of knowledge of L2 grammatical rules here is knowing an *explicitly formulated* grammatical rule, as found in a pedagogical grammar book, for example. An explicitly stated grammatical rule would hardly be the true representation of the rule in a native speaker's mind, for a native speaker is quite incapable of formulating (does not have explicit knowledge of) the generalization; or, he formulates one only after some time of considering examples of language covered by the rule. Terrell (1991: 53) states: "According to Krashen, current second language acquisition research supports the notion that an explicit knowledge of how forms and structures function in the target language is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for their 'acquisition.'"

Words

A rule does have its natural explicit manifestation, however: it is the set of phrases or sentences (for a syntactic rule) or words (for a morphological rule) which are governed by the rule. Consider, for example, the following explicit rule:

> The past participle of a regular verb is formed by adding *-ed* (which comes in three pronunciations).

This very wide generalization covers a vast number of verbs in the English language considered as a public entity. For the individual speaker, the grammatical knowledge extends to the set of regular verbs which are familiar to him--or, more accurately, the set of regular verbs *the past participle forms of which* are familiar to him.

But, we could think, the speaker's knowledge of the rule must go *beyond* familiar forms, in order to account for innovation, the use of past participles hitherto unused and even unheard by that speaker. However, innovation here is not typical of spontaneous fluent natural-speed speech (Cf. Sell 1989: 3), particularly at the level of morphology. Seldom does one use the past participle of a verb having never heard it.

But let us consider that case. Let us suppose that a speaker finds himself in mid-sentence and is pressed to use the past participle of a verb, having never used or heard that form. He hesitates and perhaps takes a guess or begins his sentence again. In that case, the extent of his knowledge does not take in this item, even if he guesses right.

In general, knowledge of morphology seems to extend exactly to the limits of personal experience with concrete words. The proficient speaker has had experience in using, and certainly hearing, many verbs in the past participle form, whereas he is unable to state explicitly

generalized rules that classify verbs according to their past participle forms--without actually "trying out" the past participle of each verb that occurs to him to consider--that is to say, when reflecting on what he knows, he reflects on concrete examples. Ard and Gass (1987: 249) consider "how syntactic patterns arise. Our data suggest that the initial approach may be a piecemeal one with learners learning lexical items as unique bits of language information." In that case, learners' knowledge of the grammar involved (at that initial stage at least) is limited to concrete lexical items.

Word sequences

Widdowson (1989: 128) offers the consideration that "competence for use may involve not so much the generation of expressions by direct reference to rules as the adjustment of pre-assembled and memorized patterns." And (1989: 135), "a great deal of knowledge seems to consist of formulaic chunks, lexical units completely or partially assembled in readiness for use." Along the same lines, we see that familiarity with a past participle goes beyond the word itself to take in the immediate environments (phrases, etc.) typically accompanying it, as with the example *been*:

would've been / he's been there / I've never been late, etc.

Many such word sequences with past participles are familiar to native speakers of English--who use them fluently and, on the whole, accurately--through wide experience with them in conversation. This familiarity should be seen as a goal for L2 learners, and the means to the goal should be basically the same: experience in hearing and speaking with many past participles in typical contexts.

There is found here a key to pronunciation development in L2. Learners' hopes of acquiring a native-like, or at least a well received, pronunciation is a praiseworthy goal. And it can be readily fostered within the context of promoting familiarity with word sequences. By way of example, consider how past participles and their environments might sound in normal conversational English speech:

Could he have stopped?	[kudi:'vstapt]	*Note: These are informal representations*
Why is he here?	[waizi:hir]	*of very reduced pronunciations, with*
You have to drive.	[yuæft'draiv]	*schwa indicated by ['].*
I'm going to have tea.	[aim'n'ævti:]	
He asked him to leave.	[i:æstimt'li:v]	

Reduced forms of pronunciation tend to be looked upon as a problem for learners. In fact, they are, in many cases, rather a simplification of the pronunciation problem. It is obviously easier to pronounce sentences like those above in their reduced forms than to go to the trouble of producing each word with its "dictionary" pronunciation as if each word stood in isolation. [æstim] is clearly more easily said than [æs-k-t-him]. Dealing in whole phrases can facilitate the acquisition of natural pronunciation skills.

Conversely, training in pronunciation skills facilitates recognition of whole phrases, which of course contributes directly to comprehension of meaning when listening to L2. Let us consider here just two areas of interest in connection with familiarity with phrases and wider comprehension: "superfluous" expressions in normal communication in English, and content vocabulary.

Superfluous expressions

It is most helpful to be acquainted with clichés that can function as "fillers" in conversation which add little or nothing to the content of a message: "[Well, I don't know. To tell you the truth, actually,] I wasn't all that interested." The superfluous words (like those shown in brackets) can be forgotten once heard. This reduces the burden of understanding for the listener, somewhat similar, perhaps, to reading for main ideas while benefiting from details which *contribute* to the main ideas rather than *compete* with them.

These fillers will tend to absorb a disproportionate amount of attention if a learner tends to assign the same importance to everything being heard. A speaker may introduce a topic with "You know something?" If the listener is not experienced in this specific use of this question, he might reply "Of course!" If he is familiar with it, he will give it no further thought, make no effort to remember it as part of the speaker's message, and instead put full attention on what is to follow, which is likely to be a new idea in the conversation.

For that ability, it will be necessary for a learner to encounter such expressions in L2, as he listens to it, and to learn to recognize them immediately. Obviously it will be valuable in teaching to point out how these expressions contribute little to the message.

Content vocabulary

Of all the words in a sentence, content vocabulary tends to be more readily heard, focused upon and remembered (Cf. Sell 1988: 30). We tend to listen to a language for its content, not for the language itself--and the content vocabulary will tend to be remembered more than grammar-related words. (In the case of English, in addition, content words tend to be longer and are more likely to be stressed.)

Insofar as content words are more easily heard, they help to "expose" other words in the immediate environment. Familiarity with phrases simplifies this too. Suppose a learner knows typical phrases with "cloud": "in the clouds, a cloud of smoke, clouding up, clouded the issue, head in the clouds" (and so forth; see for example the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary). Then hearing the word "cloud" will not only expose the rest of the phrase; it will come as a sort of *key word* that suggests phrases known, while the situation, and of course the other sounds, suggest *which* phrase has been heard. And the details of its morphology and syntax, if familiar, will be, we expect, all the more easily recognized as well, even given some noise, or faulty pronunciation, or even an error in wording on the part of the speaker. (Cf. Terrell 1991: 56 on comprehension strategies: "One of the central comprehension strategies successfully employed by beginners involves the use of key words and context to assign an interpretation to an utterance.")

An utterance heard will typically contain both the familiar and the unfamiliar, of course. The following at natural speed presents some difficulty to a learner: [am'n'ævti:]. If we suppose that "tea" is understood correctly, then "have tea" may be readily understood if that sequence is familiar. Even though [am'n'] remains a mystery for the moment, the problem is reduced to that. Once the learner has tried to figure it out, it can be clarified: the teacher points out the phrase "I'm going to" and its different pronunciations, including this very reduced pronunciation (not necessarily for the learners to use in speaking, but certainly for their hearing skills).

Presenting wording

It is suggested here to give emphasis and priority to concrete wording over grammatical generalizations. Is it best, then, in teaching, to provide the "hard data" of L2 wording, to familiarize learners with it, and then go on to provide the more abstract explanations of grammar that organize the data? Discovering regularities and generalizations in a new language, and wondering about them, can be one of the exciting aspects of language study. To allow for this, language teachers might best hold back a bit on providing ready-made answers, and, instead, encourage to some extent *personalized* generalizations by the learner. A foreign language program could aim at providing a rather large bulk of material for familiarization through listening; and an important feature of the program would be to foment the discovery of word boundaries, the internal make-up of words (to lead into simple conclusions, or guesses, about morphology), and of word order (leading gradually into syntax).

At the same time, learners' discoveries need guidance: correction, confirmation, widening, narrowing. And the exercises themselves of the program can do some of the guiding. By way of example, and referring once again to past participles, consider an exercise where learners hear a passage containing past participles (*written , ridden, stolen,* etc.), many

of which happen to end in *-en*. This coincidence may be enough to call the learners' attention to the consistency. Still, a further exercise could also be presented, where the learners try to write out the past participles they are able to catch while listening to the same passage once again.

Accurate learning

Accurate hearing is prerequisite to accurate speaking. With Japanese learning English, the impression is strong that the various degrees of a foreign "accent" and many cases of errors in L2 morphology, syntax and vocabulary usage can, to a great extent, be traced back to faulty hearing. It seems typical that beginning learners will not interpret L2 sounds correctly. This is a problem for them at the level of phonology, but it is also due to a lack of familiarity with common word sequences, since familiar wording in an utterance will tend to impose interpretations on unfamiliar parts of the utterance, and the imposed interpretations of wording will facilitate interpretations of the L2 sounds in which the wording is couched. It can be quite difficult to make out a word from its sounds alone if it is pulled from its context, as is demonstrated by broadcasting about one second of recorded speech. Conversely, if little or none of the wording of an utterance is familiar, the sounds themselves will be all the more difficult to interpret. Here, too, we see the importance of growing familiar with concrete examples of wording, which will guide the accurate hearing of L2 sounds, which in turn will reinforce an accurate familiarization once again of wording. It follows that pronunciation training should often be carried out within contexts of meaningful wording.

There will be many benefits to a learner who comes to hear wording accurately. In order to develop this ability, there are two types of practice that we can consider here: *listening for form*, and *repetition for form* .

In connection with listening for form, let us see a claim made by Terrell: "If one asks whether EGI [explicit grammar instruction] automatically leads to an immediate increased fluency or accuracy in ordinary speech, the answer is clearly 'no'" (1991: 54), where EGI is "somewhat loosely [intended] to mean the use of instructional strategies to draw the students' attention to or focus on form and/or structure (1991: 53)." Whether or not the answer is clearly "no" may depend on what instructional strategies one is familiar with. A Japanese learner listening *for* English articles is more successful in hearing them, and therefore better able to note their distribution in discourse, and therefore gradually in a better position to notice slight differences in meaning when A and THE are interchanged in given phrases.

This listening *for* form is widely applicable. With the appropriate directions, learners' attention can be focused on any feature of form in the wording of utterances they hear. In the case of Japanese speakers learning English, to mention some examples, it is valuable to give attention to areas like the following:

In relation to phonology: suprasegmentals like stress, rhythm and intonation. Selected segmentals, both vowels and consonants.
In relation to morphology: indicators of number, tense; noun/adjective distinctions; etc.
In relation to syntax: small, easily missed words between the content vocabulary: articles, prepositions, etc.
In relation to vocabulary usage: noting the sentence subjects, objects, main verbs, etc.
Many such exercises can be carried out without, or prior to, the learners seeing the script of the listening passage.

Gathercole questions the assumption that comprehension precedes production in native language acquisition, pointing out that the relationship between comprehension and production is complex, as is seen in cases of use of forms prior to understanding them, and suggests that "it is a mistake to conclude that one is more essential or facilitates acquisition more than the other" (1988: 417).

Somewhat in the same direction, perhaps, and regarding L2, we can consider assigning to certain speaking exercises a role in the development of hearing skills: here, let's look at simple repetition as an example. Language programs generally incorporate listening exercises as well as opportunities for speaking. Between these two areas, as it were, repetition (even mimicking) finds its place, to the benefit of both hearing and speaking skills. Repeating words, phrases and short sentences after a native speaker model voice promotes not only skills of articulation, but also a closer attention to the details of sounds and wording. Repetition as a procedure of practice may not directly promote realistic and freer speaking abilities. However, the experience of having repeated a phrase *highlights* it for when it is later heard again in the flow of speech. (We know the experience of learning a "new" L2 word, only to find that, thereafter, we seem to hear it all the time.)

It is recommendable to carry out repetitions on a large number of typical, frequently occurring word sequences--taken from meaningful material in context. It is easy to see that this will simplify the learner's task later, when listening to normal speech. Even if he had heard the phrases and noted their meaning or use more or less--and even if he had thoroughly studied them--repetition on top of that will leave the phrases all the more highlighted and recognizable when listening to conversation at natural speeds. (Note that, for reduced pronunciations in English, caution is needed. Many cases of reduction would be unnatural if used by a beginning learner who is still unsure of the levels of politeness or the informality involved. Repetition practice may not be appropriate until learners are fluent enough in speaking to be able to handle such forms naturally.)

In conclusion

It is suggested here, then, to give emphasis and priority to concrete wording in language teaching in the interest of helping the learner acquire a natural type of knowledge of grammar. An important role for the teacher will be to foster the learning of many typical word sequences, to establish them as available for easy recall and fluent and accurate delivery in conversational communication.

We can conclude with an example. Terrell reports that "in spite of concentrated instruction on the forms and uses of the Spanish subjunctive, first-year university students were unable to use the mood correctly in free conversation." It may be that grammatical knowledge, of itself, will not lead directly to proficiency in speaking. But we cannot conclude from this that training in the wording of utterances would not accelerate learning or acquisition. In this case, note that many concrete phrases (taking in a suitable range of verbs) will reflect the French subjunctive. And each one of the phrases needs to be learned--in typical sentences and situations. As a result, there are two tasks here facing the learner: learning each phrase orally, to be able to deliver it orally; and learning when and where to use the phrases appropriately, according to context, situation, etc. If the students referred to here learned, in class, to articulate phrases in the subjunctive but did not manage to use them in free conversation, that would mean that the students were only part of the way to their goal of acquiring the subjunctive. It would not necessarily mean that the classroom practice was unproductive.

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Summary

The importance of multiple-word sequences in second language (L2) learning or acquisition is widely accepted. In this paper some aspects of (1) abstract knowledge of grammar and (2) concrete familiarity with wording (the make-up and sequencing of words in sentences) are considered in relation to multiple-word sequences, and applications are suggested for language teaching.

It is suggested that the most natural expression of a grammatical rule is not an explicit statement of grammar, but rather it is the very set of concrete words or phrases or sentences within which the rule applies. In the case of a morphological rule, in particular, knowledge of grammar seems to extend exactly to the limits of familiarity with each of the words covered by the rule. And this familiarity goes beyond the word itself to take in the immediate environments (word sequences, phrases) that typically accompany the word.

Acquisition of pronunciation skills facilitates recognition of whole phrases, which contributes directly to comprehension of meaning when listening to L2. In this connection, "superfluous" expressions in conversational communication and content vocabulary are considered.

In order to help learners hear wording accurately, listening for form and repetition for form are recommended as formats of practice.

It is suggested to give emphasis and priority to concrete wording over grammatical generalizations in language teaching in order to allow for personalized discovery of generalizations on the part of the learners, while providing them guidance as well.